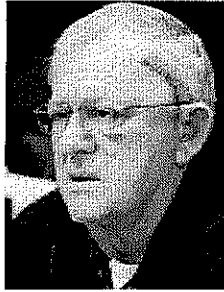


Bill Janklow



PIERRE, S.D. (AP) - As governor of South Dakota for 16 years, Bill Janklow was always in a hurry - pushing lawmakers to approve his proposals and racing to disaster sites to take charge. His need for speed also likely played a role in his one regret: the 2003 fatal traffic accident that landed him in jail and ended his political career.

As South Dakota's attorney general, governor and congressman, the colorful politician dominated the state's political landscape for more than a quarter century, changing the face of the state's economy, education system and tax structure. Even his enemies - and there were many - admitted the Republican had a talent for getting things done, even as they complained that he ran roughshod over his opponents.

Janklow died shortly before 11 a.m. Thursday of brain cancer after being moved to hospice care in Sioux Falls earlier in the week, his son Russ Janklow said. He was 72.

At a final news conference in November, Bill Janklow had announced he had inoperable cancer and said his only regret was running a stop sign and killing a motorcyclist. The accident happened less than a year after Janklow was elected to the U.S. House.

"If I had it to do over, I'd do everything I did, but I'd stop at a stop sign," Janklow said.

A fresh incision curving along his hairline from temple to ear, Janklow broke down and cried as he announced he was dying.

Janklow was known as a brilliant lawyer, a dynamic and brash speaker and an innovative governor. He had a long list of accomplishments, including saving rail service for much of the state, cutting property taxes and leading the nation in connecting classrooms to the Internet.

"To me, it seems indisputable he was South Dakota's greatest governor," Dave Knudson, a former legislator who served two stints as Janklow's chief of staff said after Janklow announced he had brain cancer. Janklow was driven to solve problems, Knudson said. < /P>

Janklow also had a reputation as an abrasive man who refused to compromise and sometimes blasted his opponents in public. Yet he quietly helped many people down on their luck, paying to send young people to college or buying gear for a baseball team from an American Indian reservation.

"My whole life has been fighting for people. It's what I know how to do in terms of representing people," he said shortly before his political career ended.

It came to an end when he sped through a stop sign in August 2003 while returning home from an event in Aberdeen. A jury later convicted Janklow of second-degree manslaughter and misdemeanor charges of reckless driving, failure to stop and speeding. He was ordered to serve 100 days in jail.

During the trial, Janklow claimed low blood sugar as a result of diabetes had dulled his senses and reflexes.

Though he was contrite, Janklow noted in an appearance before the Supreme Court in 2005 that he had won praise for driving fast while he was governor.

"When I was racing to fires in the Black Hills or storms in Herrick or floods in Watertown ... I was a hero for getting there in a hurry. When I got blown off the road in a tornado going to Spencer, people complimented me," he said in asking the court to reinstate his license. It later did.

When a tornado destroyed much of the small town of Spencer in 1998, Janklow was there within an hour. During the 50-mile drive from his home east of Sioux Falls, he hit the edge of the storm, got blown into the ditch, and then drove back onto the highway.

When a family was held hostage in the Capitol while he was attorney general, he showed up carrying an automatic rifle to help officers deal with the incident, which ended when the hostages escaped.

Janklow also was known for using humor and sarcasm in his fights with other officials. He once told a former state lawmaker in a heated exchange of letters: "My mom said I should never call a person a 'Jerk' in writing. Please send me your phone number." During a long-running battle with then-Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich over South Dakota's effort to lure Minnesota businesses, Janklow joked, "I suppose they'll claim they have major league baseball in Minnesota," at a time when the Twins were foundering.

"The thing that I have always appreciated about Governor Janklow is you never get knifed in the back," then-House Democratic Leader Mel Olson joked at a 2002 ceremony. "You occasionally get one in the forehead or the chest, but you never get it in the back, and you can't say that about everybody else."

It was all part of the unconventional style of a man who was a maverick from a young age.

William J. Janklow was born Sept. 13, 1939, in Chicago. After the death of his father, who helped prosecute Nazis for war crimes, his mother moved the family to her hometown of Flandreau, S.D. Janklow got into trouble in high school, so he left to join the

Marines.

He talked his way into the University of South Dakota, even though he had not graduated from high school, and received a bachelor's degree in 1964 and a law degree in 1966. Along the way, he married his wife, Mary Dean Thom, in 1960. They had three children.

Janklow represented poor clients on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in 1966-1973, winning acquittals in several felony cases. The state then hired him to prosecute members of the American Indian Movement for a riot at the Custer County Courthouse.

He was elected attorney general in 1974 by defeating his boss, incumbent Kermit Sande, then went on to run for governor. In his 1982 re-election bid, he received 71 percent of the vote, the largest winning margin in any gubernatorial race in state history.

He saved rail service in the state by persuading the Legislature to raise the state's sales tax temporarily to buy tracks being abandoned by a railroad company. He got interest-rate laws changed to lure credit-card companies to South Dakota. He pushed through a plan to convert the Springfield campus of the University of South Dakota into a prison where inmates get vocational training.

At the end of his second term, Janklow revealed that he had nearly resigned after a book and magazine article, both published in 1983, repeated an old rape allegation against him. Three federal investigations determined the allegation - that he had raped a teenager girl in 1968 on the Rosebud Indian Reservation - was untrue.

After reaching the constitutional limit of two consecutive four-year terms as governor, Janklow lost the 1986 Republican Senate primary to incumbent Jim Abdnor. He spent his time on the political sidelines working for an investment company and practicing law, before returning to the governor's office with victories in 1994 and 1998.

In his last two terms as governor, Janklow gained approval for his plan to boost state aid to school districts and used inmates to wire public school classrooms to the Internet, leading the nation in that effort.

CHET BROKAW/Associated Press

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